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The Pantacle - A Teaching Story

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Michael came, walking slowly, purposefully, to the stone circle deep in the woods. Stripped of clothes he came, naked to the wind the moon and the stars, a cord of red twice his height tied round his waist, a black-hilted knife at his left hip. He tried to still his mind, remember his lessons, push his thoughts to the back of his mind, and just feel; the feel of the Earth on which he trod, the feel of the wind on his body, the feather- weight touch of the moonlight on his skin. He tried to put himself in harmony with the grand design of the Universe, the purpose of the evening, he willed himself sternly to master his emotions, listen and look with sacred intent.

He came, bearing the pantacle before him, balanced firmly on his hands. Silver, it was, silver like the moon, carved and etched, polished, burnished and blackened with signs and symbols. How he had sweated over it, this past year, with hammer and chisel, graver and burin, acids and wax, the tools of the silversmith. A year and a day it had been, since he was judged worthy to become a Priest, and given this task. His to carry, this silver shield, but not his to own, till the rite was over and he, like his father and mother before him, his aunts and uncles and grandparents for generations, inherited by solemn and sacred ceremony the High Priesthood of the Wise.

The High Priestess' athame pressed to his chest, her low, clear voice as she asked him the ritual questions, roused him as from a dream, of forest dark, and woods enchanted. He answered her with a voice not quite fearful, but not as steady as he would have wished.

"I come to this Circle seeking knowledge. I am Michael; my face you well know; I have been sworn and initiated into the Third Degree, but I would now seek the Priesthood of the Wise. I come, bringing as my key this sacred Pantacle, over which I have labored for a year and a day; I wish to be instructed in it's true meaning; to this end I present my self, the work of my hands, and two passwords: Perfect Love and Perfect Trust."

"All who bring such words are doubly welcome" the High Priestess replied, "and I give to you a third password, a kiss", And so saying, kissed him on the lips and whirled him sun-wise into the sacred space. He gazed about himself, his eyes sliding easily over the usual implements on the altar, the candles and wands, censer, bowls of incense and salt; he looked at the High Priestess expectantly.

The High Priestess spoke again, her voice reverberating through the circle, echoing back from the sacred boundary stones; "A seeker comes; this his purpose. The purpose of the Wise-to teach! As it has ever been, let it now so be done! Who shall begin?"

The Priest in the North stood forward. "I shall begin. Young High Priest to be, step to the North."

Michael walked to the North, handed the Priest his Pantacle, and stood silently while the Priest examined it, hoping that his work would be judged as correct, hoping he had made an accurate rendering of all the signs and symbols that he had been shown, a year and a day previous.

The Priest carefully examined the pantacle, turning it about to catch the light of the central fire, then handed it back to the boy.

"It is well done, all is correct. Look upon the symbol at the top of the pantacle-the upright triangle. This sign is the symbol of fire, the flame straining upwards, and stands for the three-fold salute, by which I now salute you, recognizing the fire within you, the fire of will, the will to accomplish, the will to dare. A year ago you knew nothing of the craft of the silversmith, and yet you have taught yourself to make this pantacle. I say again, well done!", and so saying, the Priest touched Michael with his athame on the right shoulder, the top of his head, the left shoulder, and again on the right shoulder.

Putting his arm around Michael's shoulder, the Priest brought Michael around sunwards a few steps, then faced him again.

"The next symbol on the pantacle is a pentagram. This pentagram stands for the five-fold salute. In the form of a pentagram with one point up, the five-fold salute symbolizes that which is the best man has to offer, ascending to the Gods, being enriched, expanded and augmented, and returning to enrich the life of mankind. Thus, the five fold salute symbolizes the microcosm of man containing the macrocosm of the Universe." So saying, the Priest touched Michael with the wand, on the right hip, head, left hip, right breast, left breast, and right hip.

A priestess stepped forward, saying, "Now, with your permission, I will carry on this candidate's instruction." The Priest bowed to her, and returned to his place in the North. The Priestess took Michael by the hand and walked with him farther around the circle, still moving sunwards. She stopped, released his hand, and faced him, taking up a bowl of blue paint. Stepping closer, she reached out her blue-daubed hand, and made the sign of the labrys on his chest.

"The next symbol on the pantacle is that of the Goddess in her aspect as the two moons, monthly waxing and waning. The waxing moon symbolizes that which is outgoing and constructive in mankind, the waning moon that which is hidden and withdrawn. The waning moon also reminds us that for every accomplishment there will be failures, that for every gain in our lives there will be setbacks; we are not to weep and wail against the Gods, or fate, or karma, but we should accept that there is a balance, and the balance will be maintained, whether we will it or not. Constructive and destructive, life and death-this is the way the world is made; that which dies paves the way for the next round of life."

The Priestess linked arms with him then, and they moved farther sunwards about the circle. She turned to him, and kissed him firmly on the mouth, saying "The next symbol on the pantacle is the kiss. I kiss you, Michael, because we are human; the Gods have created us male and female. I also kiss you in token of the perfect love and perfect trust I have for you, and for the perfect love and perfect trust you declared for us when you entered this holy space. That is why you were greeted by the High Priestess with a kiss."

Michael stood, blushing. He could still taste the sweetness of her mouth, and his body wanted to respond to her as man to woman-it was well he was carrying the pantacle in front of him; then he got himself under control, realizing the importance of this lesson; the ritual kiss would always be more than a handshake between equals, but never quite a sexual overture; an acknowledgment, not a demand. He sighed, composed himself, and looked at the next sign on the pantacle.

A stern-looking Priest came towards Michael, his face set in grim lines, carrying something Michael could not quite make out. The man faced Michael, then walked behind him, carrying what could now be clearly seen as a cat o'nine tails. Michael flinched in anticipation of being struck; surely the Priest was not going to whip him? Ouch! Yes he was!

"Michael," the Priest said, between strokes, "the next sign on the pantacle is the scourge. The scourge of memory. Stand tall, now, and be still, it will hurt worse if you try to avoid it."

Now he had stopped striking Michael with the scourge. The welts on his back stung and burned, but Michael tried to ignore the pain and concentrate on the Priest's voice as he continued.

"Michael, you told us at your First Degree initiation that you were willing to suffer to learn. This scourge will not be applied to your back again in a physical sense, but I want you to learn to look back upon your life; and take power from the foolish stupid things you have done. The mistakes, the petty jealousies, the little hurts you've inflicted on your friends, your parents, the people around you. Remember, Michael, and as you remember, allow yourself to feel sad, to feel the pain and embarrassment you've caused. Feel it, take the power from it, then let it go! Go onward, take strength from your past, don't dwell on it, but don't pretend the past never happened."

The Priest again stepped behind Michael, this time carrying a pot of something in his hand. Michael flinched again as something touched his back, but this was cool and soothing, drawing out the pain. The Priest waited a few moments, till he saw that the cooling balm had done its work, then took Michael gently by the hand and drew him along, ever sunwards, to explain the next symbol.

"The next symbol on the pantacle is the sign of the God, the horned circle. The horned circle represents, among other things, the Cretan bull, annually sacrificed by our ancestors. The bull symbolizes the wild magic of the God, the intuitional magic, the magic that springs from the instinct. The Cretan priests sacrificed the bull, thus indicating the triumph of reason and intellect over instinct and intuition. We, however are not Cretans, and we do not immolate the bull of intuition on the altar of reason. Logic and reason are fine in their place, but never neglect the way you feel; never forget that the universe is a mixture, a combination, a melding of the tangible and the unreal, instinct and logic. Now I must retire, your instruction will be completed by the High Priestess."

The High priestess approached Michael, walking slowly, deliberately, each foot placed with purpose, her upright carriage reminding him of her status, first among equals, High Priestess of the Coven, the Circle of the Wise.

She stepped closer. "Michael," she said, "the last symbol on the rim of the pantacle is the inverted triangle, the alchemical symbol of water; representing the number three, the number of life. It is a gate, a gateway of life, a gateway of time, for time is past, present, and future; life is body, mind, spirit. I am about to bestow upon you, the three-fold kiss, to bring your body, your past, your mind, the present, your spirit, and the future to bear on this moment."

So saying, she bent and kissed him, first on the right shoulder, then the left; kneeling she kissed him just above the phallus, and then on his right shoulder again.

"Michael, you have now passed around the rim of the pantacle, let us now move to the center, and I will instruct you in the meaning of the central pentagram. The pentagram in the center of the pantacle is the sign of mankind. If I stand thus, with feet apart, hands stretched to the winds, head erect, the pentagram will enclose my body. We therefore can observe that the pentagram in the center of the pantacle represents mankind in the center of the universe, surrounded by Goddess and God; blessings and reminders; past, present and future; good memories and bad; light and life, love and law. The central pentagram therefore can serve as a reminder to us, that the Universe was NOT made for man, man was made for the Universe."

She knelt at his feet, smiling, and kissed him, first on the left foot, then the right, saying, "I bless your feet, Michael, that have brought you in these ways, reminding you to be ever ready to go on foot, to help, protect, and defend the brothers and sisters of the Wise."

She kissed his knees, saying, "I bless your knees, reminding you to ever go on bent knee in humility when supplicating the Deities, that one who knows his own worth will gladly kneel in order to learn."

She kissed his phallus, and said, "I bless and consecrate the organ of generation, that in time you may know that love is the great teacher of equality; love is the prime example of man and woman as equals; two beings, alike in all ways, equal in all ways, but totally different; one incomplete without the other; forever opposite, but forever complimentary. Indiscriminate sex will gain you nothing, Michael, for though sex is magic, love is the magician."

She kissed his right and left breast, saying "I bless your breast, and remind you to keep within the safe repository of the breast, the secrets of the Wise, as if under lock and key."

Then she kissed him on the mouth, and said, "I bless your mouth, Michael; henceforth, as a High Priest, you will be a teacher, and the words of your mouth, based in knowledge, leavened with intuition and instinct, uttered with magical will, shall live in the memory of the Wise. Go forward, make your progress, High Priest and Magus!

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Last modified: August 19 2018 15:00:03